

## Interview H0023: with Shatra Rimshi Ganden Paljor [tib. bshad sgra rim bzhi dga' ldan dpal 'byor], (India, August 21, 1981) : Part No. 4 of 6

*Shatra was a well known aristocratic official from one of the highest and wealthiest families in Tibet. Shatra discusses details of the Pandatsang incident and Trimön's resignation, as well as details of the Dalai Lama's initial admittance as a monk. Also included are details of Tsarong shooting movies and of taking photographs of the Chöshug ceremony and how he was demoted because of this. The interviewee also speaks about the delegation sent to the Asian Conference in India and the Trade Mission and the Italian, G. Tucci's coming to Tibet.*

Regarding [Panda](#) Tobgye [tib. spom mda' stobs rgyas], after the 13th Dalai Lama passed away for the benefit of others [tib. dgongs pa gzhan don du gshegs], his personal attendant Kujar Künphela [tib. sku bcar kun 'phel lags] got punished. It was said that this was the root cause of the [Panda](#) incident.

In the beginning, the 13th Dalai Lama appointed [Panda](#) Tobgye as the Rupön [tib. ru dpon] of a Militia Regiment for guarding Markham [tib. smar khams]. The main regiment guarding Markham was the [Chadang](#) Regiment [tib. cha dang] and its Depön was Norgye Nangpa [tib. nor rgyas nang pa]. He and his soldiers were also stationed in Markham.

Panda Tobgye and Künphela had great affection [tib. mdza' brtse] for each other and Künphela was regarded highly by the Dalai Lama. When Künphela's incident occurred in Lhasa, [Panda](#) was disappointed and thought that Künphela's getting punished just after the death of the Dalai Lama was a serious breach of the law.

Therefore, [Panda](#) thought that the way the government was governing was bad and got the idea of rebelling against the [Chadang](#) Depön so he led his Militia Battalion and attacked the [Chadang](#) Regiment at night. At that time, if the Depön had been there, probably he planned to arrest him and make some destruction to the regiment. But at that time the Depön had gone to the [Tshawa](#) Butog [tib. tsha ba bu thog] area to make offerings for the deceased Dalai Lama according to the order from the Doji (Governor

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General of Kham). So probably he [Panda] killed several Gyagpön and several soldiers and also stole all the guns, cannons, and ammunition in the regiment as well as the private wealth of the Depön, Rupön, and the Gyagpön.

At that time there was a monk official who was the salt tax collector in Sog (tib. sog tshasho [sog tshwa sho]) whose name was Thubten Dawa [tib. thub bstan zla ba]. He was living near the [Chadang](#) Regiment and was also captured. They didn't even let him wear his boots. He was brought barefooted and shut up in a prison.

As soon as the government heard about this incident, since [his brother] [Panda](#) Yamphel [tib. spom mda' yar 'phel] was in Lhasa, the Assembly decided to seal the [Panda](#) House, so they sent soldiers to surround Panda's House. The officials who went to seal the house were planning to enter the house, but [Panda](#) [Yamphel] closed the gate and didn't let them in. If they had opened the gate, the officials might have entered the house right away. Therefore, the officials were left outside and the soldiers also surrounded the house. There were many people standing around watching.

Right at that time, a shot was fired from a window of Panda's house and they thought that [Panda](#) was challenging [tib. ya bzung] them and was not going to abide by the law, so the officials had to return home. After that, [Panda](#) also thought that it wasn't okay to remain in that situation so while they kept the main gate closed, they went out from the back side through a ladder and made an appeal about the matter to some important government officials.

Panda told the officials, "We had to stop the officials from entering and sealing the house. We thought that if we let them in, we wouldn't get a chance to report about the matter. Basically, it seems the cause of the incident is because [Panda](#) Tobgye attacked the [Chadang](#) Regiment at night. However, although we are brothers, we didn't hear a single word about the incident and we didn't have any relations with him nor did we consort with him [tib. phyi [lag](#) nang 'brel]. So if you seal our house because of the incident that happened in Kham, we don't have any choice but to make an appeal about this matter. Please allow us to prove the truth [tib. mtha' gsal ba'i rgyu rkyen]. Please do not do like the proverb, 'The leather rope is dragged along with the [woolen] rope [tib. thag zhor 'dreng 'drud] and seal the house in Lhasa because of the incident that happened in Kham. We will make full compensation for the weapons and ammunition and the private belongings of the Depön, Rupön, Gyagpön, and the soldiers."

At the same time, [Panda](#) also got in touch with important officials through the monastic officials of the [tratsang](#) (college) and [khamtsen](#) (residence halls) in Sera and Drepung

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monasteries to which [Panda](#) was affiliated as a sponsor funding rites [tib. thob khungs]. [Panda](#) also submitted a petition to the Assembly.

After that, when they investigated the matter, the members of the Assembly said, "If [Panda](#) Yamphel didn't have relations with Topgye and Rapga [tib. rab dga'] [a third brother], it would not be okay to seal the [Panda](#) House in Lhasa. [Panda](#) said that he was going to appeal and prove the truth, so we can leave it like this. Temporarily, we will not seal his house, but as they reported, they have to hand over all the weapons and ammunitions and make compensations for the loss of the private belongings of the Depön, Rupön, Gyagpön, and soldiers. Also the monastic [tratsang](#) and the [khamtsen](#) should act as the guarantor for this." That is how it was settled.

In Kham, [Panda](#) Tobgye caused the disturbance and he also collaborated with his brother Rapga and made the matter wider as they made much publicity in the Kham area saying, "After the death of the 13th Dalai Lama, the government is not acting the way the Dalai Lama governed the state. The most conspicuous thing is that Kujar Künphela was a well known personal attendant of the Dalai Lama, but right after the death of the Dalai Lama, they accused and interrogated Kujar and finally imprisoned and issued the verdict and banished him. Such bad things happened. Therefore, there is nothing to hope for with the Tibetan Government. So we, the people in Kham, should have solidarity." Probably they publicized and mobilized this very strongly. Some of them had placed their hopes on [Panda](#), but the majority were just wondering what would the situation become and they had two minds about this [tib. blo rtse gnyis]. Some people were just inattentive.

They [Panda Tobgye and Rapga] also said, "In the three great monasteries, Sera, Drepung, and Ganden, the majority of the monks are from Kham. So if we, the people of Kham, would withdraw from the Tibetan Government, there will be many monks supporting us and the government would not be able to stop them and they will lose control."

They had the motive of opposing the Tibetan Government, but they couldn't put it into action. At that time, the Doji [tib. mdo spyi] was the Gatsab (Acting Kalon) Trenthong [tib. bka' tshab bkras mthong]. When he heard about this, he sent troops and attacked [tib. mtha' skrod] [Panda](#) Tobgye and Rapga so the two brothers could no longer stay in Markham and ran away to China with the militias who felt guilty [tib. gnong yod pa].

After that, the Tibetan Government talked with the Guomindang through the [Khendrönlosum](#) (the Tibetan representatives in Beijing). The government told them about [Panda](#) Tobgye's serious rebellion against the government and about how he destroyed the security in the regiment and about how they [the government] therefore didn't have

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any choice but to attack them. They [the brothers] wouldn't dare to stay in Kham (in Tibet) because they were guilty and ran away to China. This is a critical point for the friendship between Tibet and China, so please hand over [Panda](#) and the militia to us. If you don't hand them over, in the future the friendship between Tibet and China will be unstable [tib. lhing ma 'jags pa]. Please think about this from the broader perspective."

At that time, the Guomindang government neither handed them over as the Tibetan government requested, nor did they support them [the brothers] to challenge the troops of the Doji. Anyway, Panda's followers kind of surrendered [to the Chinese] and they were kept in the Chinese territories in the Kham area (in Sichuan). Probably the Chinese might have thought of using them in the future if it would be beneficial. Like this, the [Panda](#) incident was concluded.

I forgot to tell you something. In the past, the father of [Panda](#) was called Nyijang [tib. nyi byams] and his son was called Nyima. From their time Pandatshang was working as the government's trader [tib. gzhung tshong] and all of the wool trade was controlled by them. Only [Panda](#) was allowed to do the wool trade. I am not sure how much profit they got from doing this government trade.

Later, the elder son of [Panda](#) died, and Yamphel succeeded in doing the government trade. So when Panda's house was going to be sealed, [Panda](#) reported to the government, "We still haven't concluded the accounting of the government trade." At that time, [Panda](#) used an effective method when they didn't let the officials who came to seal up the house go inside. As for the gunshot, they said that their servant was nervous and the gun went off accidentally. They didn't confess that they fired the gun. They didn't have any choice but to confess that they had to close the main gate.

Regarding the resignation of the [Shape](#) Trimön [tib. khri smon], at that time he was the Senior [Shape](#) [tib. khri pa] and it had been a long time since he had become a [Shape](#). So he was the one most familiar with the work of the Kashag and he was also the most powerful [Shape](#). Reting [on the other hand] had just become the Regent and he was not familiar with government affairs. The Ex-Prime Minister [Langdün](#) [tib. srid zur glang mdun] didn't have much responsibility.

Trimön had rich experience in all external and internal affairs so he was very powerful in the Kashag. In 1935, the Wood-Hog Year, Reting, [Trimön](#), the [Trunyichemmo](#) Dombor [tib. gdong por], etc., went to look for visions in the holy lake called Chönkhor Gyal [tib. chos 'khor rgyal] with regard to the search for the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama. When they were looking for the vision, Reting and [Trimön](#) talked for a long time about the

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vision every night. At that time, Reting and [Trimön](#) seemed very friendly and Reting had high appreciation for [Trimön](#), but [Trimön](#) was telling Reting that he was old and he would not be able to serve Reting for a long time. This was what people from outside [heard].

At that time, Reting was young, but he could think from a very broad perspective. Since [Trimön](#) was very powerful in the Kashag, it might inconvenience Reting and the Ex-Prime Minister when they wanted to make some decisions. So Reting had the idea of granting the resignation of [Trimön](#), so right at that time Reting told [Trimön](#), "Since I am young and not familiar with the affairs, I feel at ease because you are taking the main responsibility. If you were not in the Kashag, it would be difficult for me to manage the responsibilities because I don't have experience. And the Ex-Prime Minister also doesn't have much experience." Therefore, [Trimön](#) thought that Reting was evaluating me so highly so if he would resign as [Shape](#), Reting might give me a promotion to the post of Silön. This is what I heard [he thought]. So right at that time [Trimön](#) asked for permission to resign.

Now, I will tell you about the things that happened since the Dalai Lama was ordained as a monk (tib. chöshug [tib. chos zhugs]). It was in the Fire-Hog Year, in 1947, that the Dalai Lama went to Sera and Drepung Monastery to get ordained into the monk's order. According to tradition, he went to Drepung with an elaborate procession (tib. chibgyur [chenmo](#) [chibs sgyur chen mo]) that consisted of a line of all the government officials on horseback. Just after he went to Drepung, the Reting incident occurred. Therefore, all people felt kind of the uneasy and worried about whether his admission ceremony would be successful or not. But actually there wasn't any problem during this ceremony.

First he went to Drepung. The ceremony was held according to tradition and fried cookies were served to the monks. The formal ceremony for starting his study of dialectics [tib. mtshan nyid dbu 'dzugs] was held in the [dharma grove](#) of Drepung Küngarawa [tib. kun dga ra ba]. At that time, it started from the Pargya Parimita Pharchin [tib. phar phyin]. At the beginning, the Regent [Taktra](#) gave the teaching from the Pharchin. After that, the Dalai Lama and the lamas assisting the Dalai Lama in the dialectics debate (tib. tsenshab [tshan zhabs]) repeated it again. After that, the Dalai Lama sat down to answer questions in the debate (tib. damja [dam bca']) and the 7 tsenshab started to debate on the Pharchin by turns. The ceremony was successful. After that, he also attended the [tshogchen](#) [the largest prayer assembly] which included the four [tratsang](#) (colleges): [Gomang](#) [tib. sgo mang], [Deyang](#) [tib. sde yangs], [Loseling](#) [tib. blo gsal gling], and Ngagpa [tib. sngags pa].

At that time, the different [tratsang](#) served the Dalai Lama food and did their services and they also served fried cookies to all the officials according to their ranks. The ceremony

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was held in an elaborate way and all the [tratsang](#) did their best and they also served the monks rice gruel. All of the [tratsang](#) invited the Dalai Lama one after another and at first they invited the Dalai Lama to his room. They also arranged the accommodations for all the government officials according to their rank.

After the ceremonies in the [tratsang](#) were over, the Dalai Lama went to the Namgyal Tratsang [tib. rnam rgyal grwa tshang][in the Potala]. They also served food and fried cookies to all the government officials. Then the Dalai Lama also went to Tashi Khangsar [tib. bkra shis khang gsar] which was belonged to Namgyal Tratsang and held a similar ceremony. At that time the government also made very elaborate offerings to the prayer assembly. When the ceremony in Drepung was almost over, according to tradition, the Dalai Lama went to the hermitage on the mountain above Drepung (tib. gemphel ritrö [dge 'phel ri khrod]) where there was the 5th Dalai Lama's room. Before the Dalai Lama arrived, the room was renovated and a ceremony was also held there.

After that, the Dalai Lama went to Sera and on the way he stopped at [Nechung](#) Jog [tib. gnas chung lcog] where they also served fried cookies and snacks like the other [tratsang](#). When the Dalai Lama came there, the [Nechung](#) oracle also went into trance and all of the government officials were also invited into the deities chapel and served tea. There was a very sacred mask called Senbag Mugchung [tib. bse 'bag smug chung] which usually was not allowed to be shown to anybody, but at that time they showed it to the Dalai Lama. We just heard about this since we were not allowed in the temple. We saw that [Nechung](#) Deity received and saw off the Dalai Lama while the oracle was still in trance.

During the Drepung ceremony, one day all of a sudden a poster was stuck up. Probably this was done by Reting's followers. The poster said, "The Dalai Lama has to go to Sera to get ordained as a monk so all of the [tratsang](#) in Sera will do their best to serve the Dalai Lama because of our gratitude. This is done mainly because of the ceremony of getting ordained as a monk. However, in case some reckless [tib. [gang](#) byung mang byung] people would come, something strange might happen." This poster implied that since the Regent [Taktra](#) was with the Dalai Lama, it would not be okay if he would come and probably they were threatening him. But the regent was not suspicious of that poster and he went to Sera with the Dalai Lama from [Nechung](#) via Parikhug [tib. brag ri khug] and then directly to Sera. The Dalai Lama stayed in the room above the assembly hall and [Taktra](#) also stayed in a room with a large windows on the assembly hall.

At that time, since it was just after the Sera war had calmed down, the security was quite strict. Guards were stationed near the doors and soldiers were patrolling everywhere near



the room where the Dalai Lama stayed. When people were granted an audience with the Dalai Lama, he was protected by his Bodyguard Regiment. Some of the trustworthy Rupön and Gyagpön of the [Trapchi](#) Regiment were standing on guard on the left and right side of Taktra's throne. At that time, there wasn't any appearance of any challenge [tib. ya bzung] to him, but they were on high alert.

The Dalai Lama also went to the three tratshang in Sera, [Je](#), [Me](#), and Ngagpa, and the [tratsang](#) served elaborated food for the two tutors to the Dalai Lama and all the government officials. In particular, [Sera Je](#) had just had the misfortune, but they were not reluctant and they did their best in terms of service. They also gave rice gruel to the people who came for pilgrimage in Sera. The government also offered alms and other things very elaborately. After the ceremonies in the [tratsang](#) were over, the Dalai Lama went to the [chöra](#) (debating grove) and watched the monks doing dialectics debate though he didn't participate in the debates. The abbots of the [tratsang](#) were answering the questions in the debate.

When the Dalai Lama came to [Sera Je](#), the monks performed prayers in the [chöra](#). When they recited the longevity prayer for the Dalai Lama, probably they were only paying attention [tib. do snang] to the longevity prayer composed by the Reting and were not attentive for the longevity prayer composed by [Taktra](#). So when they prayed the longevity prayer, it was kind of silent because only the prayer leader and the prayer chanting monks (tib. sungsa [gsung bzang ba]) recited the prayer and the other monks didn't recite much. They didn't do that to disrespect the Dalai Lama, but it was because it was not okay to recite the longevity prayer composed by Reting, but they had to recite the longevity prayer composed by the [Taktra](#). They could recite the old one by heart, but they didn't want to recite the new one composed by [Taktra](#) and didn't recite it.

One particular thing that happened at that time was that the government had not made preparations to shoot movies and take photos of the ceremony to remember it in the future. It was also prohibited for individuals to shoot movies and take photos. However, at that time there were a few people taking photos and Tsarong shot some movies which we could watch later. At that time, [Shölkhang](#) Jedrung [tib. rje drung] was the Lhasa Nyertshang [tib. lha sa gnyer tshang] [the head of the office in charge of offerings in Lhasa]. When the Dalai Lama was going for the circumambulation around Drepung and did the consecration and baptism [tib. khrud gsol rab gnas] in the four directions, [Shölkhang](#) Jedrung probably took a photo. The Drönyerchemmo and those people saw

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him taking the photo and they inquired about this and he was severely criticized and was demoted to the rank of ordinary monk official.

At that time, everything was done according to tradition and if someone did something new, it was regarded as inappropriate to the situation then. Whoever did something like that, all people disliked them and the government itself also prohibited it. This is what I saw at that time.

Right at the time of the Dalai Lama's Ordaining Ceremony in Drepung, it was confirmed that the trade mission for buying gold and silver that consisted of [Shakabpa](#) [tib. zhwa sgab pa], Trekhang Khenjung [tib. bkras khang mkhan chung], and other officials were to depart from Lhasa so they held the departure audience with the [Kashag] (tib. thönchag [thon phyag]).

I will tell you a little bit about the sending of a delegation to the Asian Countries United Conference [tib. shar phyogs rgyal khab kyi mnyam 'brel tshogs 'du]. This was held on the 23rd of the 3rd Lunar month in the Fire-Hog Year in 1947. At that time, India was about to gain its independence and the above mentioned meeting was convened in India. The Indian Government sent the invitation to the Tibetan Government requesting it to send a delegation. The government sent a delegation led by [Sambo](#) Theiji Tsewang Rinzin [tib. bsam pho tha'i ji tshe dbang rig 'dzin] and included Khenjung Lobsang Wangyal [tib. blo bzang dbang rgyal] and Rimshi Kyibug [tib. skyid sbug], etc. I heard that they attended the meeting and hoisted the flag of the Tibetan Government and gave lectures saying that, "We are glad to be able to attend the meeting. India and Tibet have had religious and cultural relations through our long history and we, Tibet, would like to request the Asian Countries to cooperate and have unity and solidarity with us and safeguard peace."

At that time, the delegation of the Guomindang had also arrived and I heard they caused a little bit of trouble and said that, "Tibet was a part of China. Since we are here as the delegation of the Guomindang, the Tibetans should attend as part of our delegation and they don't need to attend under a separate name. If the Tibetan delegation wants to take the name of the Tibetan Government, there is no use for the Guomindang delegation to attend the meeting, so we are going to withdraw."

To this the Indian Government said, "We happily invited all the delegations and we are glad to have all of you attending the meeting, so we request that the delegation of the Guomindang attend the meeting. As for the Tibetan Government, we invited them because we have relations in religion, culture and all respects, so we also request them to attend



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the meeting. If you are unable to attend the meeting, then we can't do anything." Later the Guomindang delegation also attended the meeting.

Regarding the departure of the trade mission for buying gold and silver, they went via India to Hong Kong, China, America, and London. At that time they took passports with the seal of the [Tibetan] Foreign Office [tib. phyi rgyal las khungs] and the countries where they traveled accepted their passports and they didn't have any hindrances. I heard that the purpose of sending them was because previously Tibet couldn't sell wool and other things directly to the foreign countries. They were sold to the Indian traders who acted as middlemen and we suffered a great loss regarding prices. So in order to sell wool directly to countries like America and get the U.S. dollars and British Pounds, they were sent as a trade mission to talk about those matters. Also at that time, the [Trapchi](#) Lekhung [tib. grwa bzhi las khungs] had printed Tibetan paper money, so it wasn't okay if we didn't have something that supported [tib. rgyab rten] that. So they were also sent to buy some gold. This was what they announced outwardly. I didn't know what internal political tasks they had. The main leader was [Shakabpa](#) who was a Tspön and also the one in charge [tib. do dam pa] of the [Trapchi](#) Lekhung. On the other hand, he also had some experience doing private trade. Trekhang was his younger brother. I also heard that [Shakabpa](#) and [Taktra](#) had a close relationship. Anyway, they were sent as the trade mission. As for the interpreter, the Depön of the [Trapchi](#) Regiment [tib. dbus mda'], Surkhang Rimshi [tib. zur khang rim bzhi], was sent because he knew a little bit of English, however, his standard was not enough to interpret talks in foreign countries so Surkhang himself hired another interpreter and took him [the interpreter] with him. One of the members was [Panda](#) Yamphel who was experienced in trade. They went to the above mentioned countries and discussed how they had to receive Indian Rupees [not dollars or pounds] if we make the bales of wool [for export] in India [they were made in Kalimpong]. Detailed information was in the documents, but I didn't know what they said in detail. They bought a quite a lot of gold and imported it and handed it over to the government. I don't remember the amount.

At that time, they also talked about setting up a trade mission [tib. tshong don don gcod] office and finally the Trade Mission in Kalimpong was set up. I heard that when [Shakabpa](#) and those people came back, they made a statement about what they did and what they discussed with the countries and they reported this to the Assembly. In short, they handed over the gold to the Inner Treasury [tib. mdzod sbug] of the Dalai Lama.

Shakabpa also imported some farm machines to be used as an experiment. At that time, the two Germans, Henrich Harrer and Aufschneider, were in Lhasa and these

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[machines] were handed over to them. They were given the responsibility to train people to use the machines. I don't have any details about the results. They also bought some medicines for veterinary care and for preventing cattle sicknesses. Since we didn't have modern hospitals at that time, the medicines were handed over to the Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute (tib. Mentsikhang [sman rtsis khang]).

I will tell you little bit about the Italians who came to Tibet. It was in the Earth-Mouse Year in 1948. The Italian Tucci asked permission to come to Tibet through the Sikkim Political Officer and the permit was granted. At that time foreigners were not allowed come to Lhasa indiscriminately. In case some foreigners wanted to come, they had to ask for the permission for the entry through the Sikkim Political Officer. Tucci was granted a permit and he came to Lhasa and went everywhere visiting the ancient temples.